

# THE CLASS CLEAVAGE

The Political Mobilization  
of the European Left, 1860–1980

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## THE CLASS CLEAVAGE: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

To define what is “left” within the European cultural and political experience, scholars have come up with a variety of focuses.<sup>1</sup> The connotation of “left” may be independent of any school or doctrine and may identify a position of loyalty to the original programs, to the *statu nascenti* doctrine, or to the spirit of the original creed. This conception justifies such terms as “dynastic left” (liberal parliamentarians who installed Luis Philippe [1830] on the throne but later opposed Guizot in the name of the original manifesto); *fascismo di sinistra* (the original radical corporativist and anticapitalist spirit of the fascist movement, as expressed in the San Sepolcro manifesto of 1919 or in the *punti di Verona*); and “Catholic left” (linked closely to the original evangelical message of solidarity and egalitarianism and to the social doctrine stemming from it). More typical of philosophical analysis is to view “left” (and “right,” of course) as referring to patterns of thought and behavior that are embedded profoundly and permanently in human nature: “to become” versus “to be”; change versus conservation; the ontological opposition between a right-handed and a left-handed cosmology. Another tradition is to search for the permanent value, or constant guide, of the left – the general principle that it embodies and that differentiates it from any other current of political thinking. The emphasis is most frequently placed on the value of “equality,” although this is defined in different ways.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in a more histori-

<sup>1</sup> For general overviews, see Laponce (1981) and Cofrancesco (1990: 4th ed., vol. 18, 883–884).

<sup>2</sup> For this line of search, see Bobbio (1994) and Lukes (1995).

cally defined context, “left” is a spatial location, originally linked to the position within the parliamentary hemicycle. This conception of the left has little to do with issues and principles; it is relational and changes over time, just as it also depends on what else defines the spatial continuum.

All these meanings attempt to define the left independently of the name of its historical actor. My aim here is not so ambitious and the left I will be speaking of is identified with a specific set of ideas and political and social organizations stemming from the Industrial Revolution: *socialism*. From a broad historical perspective, the patterns of industrialization and democratization resulted in the structuring of working-class movements that developed either into a single socialist party or, alternatively, into a socialist party plus a communist party. Later on, this picture was complicated by the emergence of other parties that resulted from splits within the two main tendencies. The class conflict is mostly responsible for the similarity of “party landscapes” across Europe. It was the only social conflict to be politically mobilized in every European country, contributing to the standardization of party systems. The ubiquitous presence of socialist and communist parties is indeed the most visible common feature of European party systems, while most of the variance *among systems* is accounted for by other nonindustrial or preindustrial cleavages, the decisive contrasts of which shaped the individual constellation of each system.<sup>3</sup>

This is a historical identification of the left with no ambition to being a theoretical definition, and I am aware of its shortcomings. Grouping all these parties<sup>4</sup> since the end of the nineteenth century into one category such as the “class left,” on the assumption that they all represent and hinge on the class cleavage, is a daring task from ideological, political, and social points of view. First, “other left” parties existed, which were neither official socialists nor official communists and which constituted a far from homogeneous category, including small parties of the extreme left as well as right-wing socialist groups with a more humanitarian or radical flavor. Second, the electoral combination of these parties does not necessarily justify their political combination, as they were often strongly opposed on many issues. Finally, it is equally audacious to regroup these parties according to their connection with the working or lower classes. The classi-

<sup>3</sup> Rokkan (1970b: 130).

<sup>4</sup> For a list of the parties that have been included in the left, the reader can consult the Appendix. Beyond the official socialist and communist parties, there are a number of other left parties whose inclusion or exclusion may be more controversial. As indicated in the text, I have included such parties that were originally splinter groups or wings of the historical socialist and communist organizations.

fication of parties that *appeal to*, *are supported by*, and *represent* such social groups may have little in common across countries.

However, these parties are unquestionably part of the genetic process of lower-class enfranchisement and early political mobilization; they had and have maintained closer contact with the trade unions than any other political family, are generally regarded as being part of one *tendance*,<sup>5</sup> and the literature is rich in hypotheses concerning this political construct, used as a meaningful term of reference for long-term electoral changes. The solution I have chosen is to subsume the three elements of the *social constituency* (support), the *ideological orientation* (appeal), and the *organizational structures* (representation) within the general historical process of class cleavage structuring. By means of a genetic approach, I hope to avoid having to resort to an implicit “class theory” of political representation.

The goal of this chapter is to discuss the nature of the class cleavage that stemmed from the Industrial Revolution and political democratization. In the first section, the concept of cleavage will be discussed and defined; then the peculiarities of the class cleavage compared to other cleavages will be specified; and finally, the macroconstellation of historical processes within which the the class cleavage was structured will be identified. In this process, I will also define my dependent and independent variables more accurately, presenting thereby the general framework for this study. In the second section, the methodological choices that underlay this research are briefly discussed and justified.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### *POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND CLASS CLEAVAGE STRUCTURING*

“Mobilization” is an ambiguous term. Imported from totalitarian theory and analysis and later used in all sorts of different contexts, it now conveys the meaning of a complex process of self-mobilization and heteromobilization – of “being mobilized” and of mobilizing.<sup>6</sup> Mobilization was a multifaceted process of citizen involvement in the (post-)national and

<sup>5</sup> The rather telling introduction of this term by André Siegfried should be noted: “Mainly preoccupied with the reality, I therefore concentrate less on parties – superficial and continuously changing categories – than on the basic tendencies”; Siegfried (1913: xxiv).

<sup>6</sup> See Neumann (1956b: 395–421) on “integration” parties addressing themselves to specific social groups that they deliberately try to mobilize, integration being at one and the same time the result of self-interest and organizational enterprise.

industrial phases of modernization. Citizens were progressively mobilized in various nonpolitical spheres: by capitalism and industrialization in the economic sphere through media such as exchange and money; through the extension of the market; geographical and labor mobility; the imposition of tariffs, credit, and capital procedures and techniques; and the availability of services and goods. They were also mobilized by the military and administrative machine of the state, as soldiers, as subjects of administrative agencies, and through traveling and residential restrictions and/or liberalization. They were also mobilized culturally through scripts and other mass media into ideological, religious, and ethnolinguistic movements by socializing agencies of the nationally dominant culture, as well as by dissident intellectuals, missionaries and messages, news, and so on.<sup>7</sup> In the Western experience of the last two centuries, mobilization appears to have acquired a self-sustaining impulse, with spillover effects between one sphere and others. Once started, it became an ongoing process whereby change concerned quantitative growth – new recruits and generation turnover – as well as qualitative structural modifications in the main forms and agencies.

Different phases or waves of (economic/administrative/cultural) political mobilization can be distinguished. However, it was the first wave that was of paramount importance because it not only opened the door to successive waves, it also set the original opportunity structure within which those that followed had to be accommodated. The first political mobilization was *the process by which former subject individuals were initially recruited as active participants in forms of nationwide organizational and electoral activities for the purpose of influencing political decision making*;<sup>8</sup> in order for this to take off, a minimum level of the other forms of mobilization had to be reached. Vertical and downward-first political mobilization was not necessarily monopolized by new actors such as political parties and interest

<sup>7</sup> On the relationship between political and other types of mobilization see Nettl (1967: 115–122).

<sup>8</sup> An analytical discussion of the concept of political mobilization is presented in Nedelmann (1987: 181–191, 199), where the distinction between the three dimensions of mobilization as “formation of interest,” “management of emotions,” and “development of instrumental capacities” is developed. Nedelmann’s general definition of political mobilization as “the actors’ attempts to influence the existing distribution of power” is too broad for our purposes. Such a definition is introduced as the result of dissatisfaction with others who limit political mobilization to the processes of authority legitimization (Nettl 1967, cited in footnote 7) or attribute excessive emphasis to the dimension of instrumentality, in the sense of mobilization as “resource control” (as utilized by Tilly [1978]). The emphasis on “recruitment of citizens in active political participation” implies a reference to the three dimensions listed by Nedelmann. However, the main concern and empirical data refer here to the development of instrumental capacities.



organizations. Political and even electoral mobilization was performed by governments, state bureaucracy, charismatic leadership, and so on. In these cases, parties and interest organizations competed with other established agencies that preceded them.<sup>9</sup> However, they remained the most important early mobilization actors. Special attention should be paid to the *specific interaction between the formation of electoral alternatives in the political arena* – that is, the formation of specific political organizations for the mobilization of the vote – *and the structuring of mass organizations in the corporate channel-of-interest organization*. The set of electoral and corporate organizations and their interaction depended on the structure of political opportunity and on the strategic choice of mobilizing actors during the formation and politicization of a given cleavage line.

Drawing on Rokkan's rich contribution to this field,<sup>10</sup> this process can be summarized in a set of analytical steps. I have slightly modified the terminology, as I believe the term "cleavage" should be kept for the politicized dividing line and not applied to the original functional, cultural, or territorial conflict.

1. The initial *generation of oppositions* due to differences of interest and/or *Weltanschauung* generated by the macroprocesses of modernization: monetarization, urbanization, secularization, cultural standardization, industrialization, administrative control, and centralization.
2. The *crystallization of opposition lines into conflicts* over public policy once (and if) the centralization of political decision making became established.
3. The *emergence of alliances of political entrepreneurs* engaged in mobilizing support for one set of policies against others.
4. The *choice of mobilization strategy* made by such entrepreneurs.
  - a. Action through and reliance on preestablished community and other association networks.
  - b. Action through and reliance on the development of purpose-specific membership organizations.
5. The *choice of arena for the confrontation* of mobilized resources.
  - a. Aggregation of votes/members for political/electoral contests.
  - b. Direct action (strikes, pressure through public demonstrations, revolt, revolution, etc.).

<sup>9</sup> H. Daalder (1966a: 43–77) directly tackles the issue of the extent to which and the conditions in which parties more or less successfully monopolized such a role vis-à-vis other agencies.

<sup>10</sup> A very large part of Rokkan's work was devoted to the problem of cleavage formation. The classic reference is (1970b: 72–144).

Historically, different alliances of entrepreneurs have chosen dissimilar strategies, both in terms of organizational choice (point 4) and in terms of confrontation-area choice (point 5). Some have relied more intensively on preexisting networks of association, such as occupational, cultural, and religious groups; others have engaged forcefully in the development of their own specific organizational weapons, as distinct and autonomous as possible from others. Some have preferred to concentrate their efforts for demand satisfaction in purely political and electoral strategies; others have resorted to more-direct actions in the market and society. For parties and groups, different strategies in different contexts have yielded different payoffs, ranging from gaining public recognition and legitimacy to substantial success through specific legislation, agreements, and package deals with the state and/or other political forces. In the analysis of historical cases, final payoffs are of great importance. Their evaluation by the actors implied feedback reactions, while any dissatisfaction with existing payoffs and arrangements involved changes in organizational and confrontation-arena strategy.

In his general classification of historical conflicts arising in the course of European modernization, Rokkan simplifies the analysis by concentrating on broad fronts of conflict in the national histories. He distinguishes four critical cleavages that he broadly attributes as the consequences of two revolutions: the national and the industrial. The processes of formation of the nation-state usually provide the potential for two fundamental conflict lines: (1) the dominant cultural group and the nation builders' elite versus the ethnically, linguistically, or religiously distinctive subjected population (i.e., external and internal conflicts concerning cultural and religious identities) and (2) the attempt by the nation-state to centralize, standardize, and mobilize versus the church and its traditional encroachments and privileges in society (e.g., secular versus clerical control of mass education). The Industrial Revolution also produced two lines of conflict: (1) the first between the predominantly rural landed interests and the emerging classes of commercial and industrial entrepreneurs (mainly over tariff policies: free trade versus the protection of agricultural products); (2) the second, *which split the urban milieu*, between the owning classes and the tenants and workers (free enterprise versus state control; rights of workers versus rights of property owners).

The age of Reformation and Counter-Reformation signaled the climax of the conflicts between the center and the periphery. The result of this was generally the strengthening and consolidation of territorial boundaries, as well as that of the linked issue of the cultural and religious identity of

the state within these boundaries. In the new polities resulting from national secessions, similar conflicts were postponed and reemerged only later in the nineteenth century. The colossal political mobilization that occurred during the French Revolution and its spread with the Napoleonic wars also determined the emergence of the potential conflict between the mobilization efforts of the state – with its need for system support and legitimacy – and the resistance of the church. The key issue quickly became the control of the growing mass-education and welfare provisions.

The structural conditions for the urban–rural economic conflict developed later. This was the result of the growth in world trade and industrial production during the nineteenth century, and it determined the conflict between the landed and urban interests regarding tariff problems, which in turn were linked to issues of the maintenance of acquired status and the recognition of achievement. These conflicts were not necessarily translated into politics everywhere, and, indeed, they were stronger or weaker according to their contextual situations. In Rokkan's reconstruction, the *roots* of these cleavages all predate the roots of the class cleavage. This point is often overlooked due to the fact that, even if these conflicts had already been present for a long time, their *electoral* mobilization tended to coincide historically with that of the class cleavage. That is, although they were the result of very different and longer lasting conflicts, they were all mobilized at exactly the time that suffrage was extended to the lower classes. Therefore, to fully appreciate the historical sequence of conflict crystallization, one should not concentrate exclusively on electoral politics, but rather on preelectoral forms of organizational developments and political conflict. This clarifies the marked historicity in the formation of basic conflict lines. This aspect of the historical sequence of conflict formation and cleavage structuring is crucial, given that the alliances among insiders at each given historical moment tended to reduce the alliance opportunities for later newcomers.

### **THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF CLEAVAGE STRUCTURING**

Despite his historically creative use of the concept of cleavage, Rokkan never gave a clear definition of what he meant by the term. Its meaning has therefore remained loose,<sup>11</sup> and the concept has been and is used in reference to all sorts of divisions and conflicts. Various authors refer to

<sup>11</sup> See Zuckermann (1975: 231–248) and (1982: 131–144).

cleavages as “political” and define them in terms of political attitudes and behavior, depriving the concept of any link to social structural variables.<sup>12</sup> Others use the term “social cleavages” to indicate nothing more than the divisions implied by social stratification. Still others have identified “cultural cleavages,” assuming that “it is a set of beliefs rather than any demographic attribute that defines one’s location along the cleavage.”<sup>13</sup> Contrary to this reduction of the concept of cleavage to one predominant dimension, more-complex conceptualizations are formulated in Eckstein’s concept of “segmental cleavages” and in the distinction made by Allardt and Pesonen between “structural” and “nonstructural” cleavage.<sup>14</sup>

The essential problem with the concept of cleavage lies in its intermediary location between the two main approaches of political sociology: that of social stratification and its impact on institutions and political behavior, on the one hand, and that of political institutions and their impact on social structure and change, on the other.<sup>15</sup> At the theoretical level, the synthesis of these different approaches is difficult; for this reason, the concept of cleavage is often either reduced *down* to that of social cleavage or raised *up* to that of political cleavage. To solve this problem, the concept of cleavage has to be regarded as a link between social structure and political order, and – in much the same way as the Marxist concept of class – it should not be considered as a descriptive concept aimed at the identification of a particular reality.

Within such a perspective, the concept of cleavage can be seen to incorporate three dimensions:<sup>16</sup> an *empirical element*, which identifies the

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Dahl (1966b: 448–486).

<sup>13</sup> See Inglehart (1984: 25–69) and Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck (1984: 3–22). Contrasting traditional with new cleavages on these grounds, this line of reasoning neglects the normative-ideological – and therefore cultural – attributes of traditional cleavages such as class. Indeed, by treating a cleavage such as class as primarily socioeconomic – or demographic – such a perspective neglects the fact that ideological or cultural factors lie at the very root of any group definition or sense of self-awareness.

<sup>14</sup> Eckstein (1966) distinguishes “segmental cleavages” from “cultural disagreement” and “specific disagreement.” Although in this case the term “cleavage” refers to the link between social structure and political order, the distinction raises problems similar to those of “cultural cleavages” in that the normative element embodied in the second category is in fact also typical of the first. The definition of “structural cleavages” by Allardt and Pesonen (1967: 325–366) is restricted to differentiated social groups that are also characterized by *cohesion* and *solidarity*. As such, in addition to the social attributes (differentiation) on which they focus, they also implicitly introduce organizational (cohesion) and cultural (solidarity) attributes, a combination that strikes me as offering the most fruitful basis on which to build a definition.

<sup>15</sup> See E. Allardt (1968: 66–74).

<sup>16</sup> For this three-dimensional characteristic of theoretical concepts, see the treatment of the

empirical referent of the concept and which we can define in *sociostructural* terms; a *normative* element, that is, the set of values and beliefs that provides a sense of *identity* and role to the empirical element and reflects the self-awareness of the social group(s) involved; and an *organizational/behavioral* element, that is, the set of individual interactions, institutions, and organizations, such as political parties, that develop, as part of the cleavage.<sup>17</sup> The term “cleavage” should, I suggest, be restricted to the indication of a dividing line in a polity that refers to and combines *all* three aspects, and alternative terms should be adopted when referring to objective social distinctions or to ideological, political, and organizational divisions per se. Because the sociostructural, normative/cultural, and political/organizational elements play an inextricable role of mutual reinforcement in shaping individual attitudes and behavior, cleavages can be considered as only one particular kind of division rather than as a concept that exhausts the realm of all possible divisions. For example, it is clear that important lines of social stratification may exist that cannot be identified as cleavages; similarly, there may exist political and ideological divisions that also, however important, cannot be identified as cleavages. Differences in occupation qua occupation, or differences in language qua language, do not produce the respective cleavage, but rather the nature and intensity of the emotions and reactions that can accompany membership in these occupational or linguistic groups, as well as the social and political bonds that organizationally unite the individuals who belong to them. Once achieved, these positions become firmly established, and it is the endurance of this entrenched position in group terms that produces the image of a

concept of class by Aron (1964: chapter 3) and the concept of nation by Lepsius (1985: 43–64). Katznelson (1986: 14–22) has reviewed the problem of the definition of class and class formation, suggesting that class formation is identified by four levels: (1) the structure of capitalist economic development, i.e., class as a constitutive element of every capitalist structure and capitalist transformation, a concept distant from empirical reality; (2) social organization of society as lived by actual people – workplace social relationships, etc., i.e., class-based ways of life; (3) class as formed groups sharing “dispositions”; and (4) collective action. I do not see clear advantages with respect to the structural, normative and behavioral components of the classic distinction between class position, class consciousness, and class action.

<sup>17</sup> These three dimensions of a cleavage should not be confused with the three “types” of cleavage mentioned by Rae and Taylor: “ascriptive” cleavages or “trait” cleavages such as race or caste; “attitudinal” or “opinion” cleavages such as ideology or preference; and “behavioral” or “act” cleavages such as those elicited through voting and/or organizational membership. These authors regard them as mutually exclusive classes of different cleavages rather than as different constitutive aspects of every cleavage. See Rae and Taylor (1970: 1–3).

cleavage becoming stable over and beyond the individuals involved, creating a specific cultural background and a varying propensity to collective action.<sup>18</sup>

From the point of view of its consequences, a cleavage has to be considered primarily as *a form of closure of social relationships*.<sup>19</sup> The concept of cleavage is therefore clearly at quite a remove from any definition of the sociostructural base that provides its reference point, and this approach clarifies the definition of the boundaries and the differences between the two. More concretely, what distinguishes class from the class-based cleavage; religiosity or the community of religious people from the religious-based cleavage; the ethnic group from the ethnolinguistic cleavage? Three key differences are evident, albeit not always to the same degree in each type of cleavage.

*First*, the sociostructural reference of a cleavage and the cleavage itself are products of different historical phenomena: The former emerges from the processes of state and nation formation and from the development of capitalism and industrialization; the latter emerges by the coupling of these processes with those of politicization, electoral mobilization, and democratization. The social basis of the class cleavage originates in the social stratification produced by industrialization and capitalist development, and these processes establish the structural conditions for group distinctiveness;<sup>20</sup> but it is also clear that the class cleavage derives its special character only in relation to the other, more strictly political processes. A similar argument holds true for religious-based cleavage, whose structural basis is set by the process of the breaking down of Christian European unity in the sixteenth century and the later process of state centralization and secularization. In the same vein, ethnolinguistic groups emerged from the long process of linguistic differentiation, migration, and state boundary creation in European history, but specific cleavages of an ethnolinguistic nature develop only in response to the modern nation builders' attempts to effect cultural and linguistic standardization and when the opportunities to express dissent and to organize opposition become available.

It is only with the development of the modern nation-state and with

<sup>18</sup> See Schumpeter (1951).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. M. Weber (1978: 43–47).

<sup>20</sup> The best conceptual reference for the result of such a process is indeed the Weberian idea of "social class" as a group of class situations that are made homogeneous by the existence of a "common possibility of mobility either within the career of the individuals or in the following of successive generation"; cf. Weber (1978: 302–305) and Giddens (1973: 47–48).

the integration of different groups into the central sphere of society that the conflicts between these groups have become centralized. State building brings about a consolidation of military, administrative, and economic boundaries that reduces the possibility of exit for individuals and groups. Nation building and attempts at national cultural standardization bring about, in varying degrees, an ethnically and culturally homogeneous context that sets the stage for the articulation of emerging functional-economic differentiation and conflicts. It is this process – one of “unifying potentially opposing camps, facilitating their society-wide organization, their becoming symbols of social and political identification and their making demands on central political institutions”<sup>21</sup> – that gives rise to the enduring relations between specific social groups, organizational networks, and ideologies. It is, finally, through the historical process of mobilization, politicization, and democratization that voice options are articulated and organized within a bounded territory and any specific cleavage acquires its distinctive normative profile and organizational network. In short, cleavages initially develop on the basis of a social stratification that sets the structural conditions for group identity; only later do they become fully political, particularly with the development of mass democracy.

If a cleavage is regarded as a conflict line or a division line *translated* into politics, the translation is what historically constitutes the linkage between social condition, consciousness, and action. Conflicts and oppositions may not be translated into politics – either repressed, depoliticized, or deflected versus other divisions or channeled into politics in various ways; they may even be generated by politics, activated and reinforced by political processes and institutions. Translation points to the crucial role of the translators and of the mechanisms and conditions of translation, and it implies that there is variance in the capacity to translate the basic preconditions. Therefore, the nature and magnitude of the sociostructural basis of the conflict must be viewed as basic conditions facilitating – to a greater or lesser degree – the translation.

The transition from the early period of politicization to the establishment of a hierarchy of superimposed cleavages, as well as to the creation of close links between cleavage systems and party systems, is complex. The “rationalistic” bias of Marxist class theory was based on a long chain of reasoning. Disciplined by the same conditions and circumstances of their work, brought together in a great multitude where they experienced the community of their status and deprivation, the workers would develop a collective class consciousness. In this phase, Marx expressed and trans-

<sup>21</sup> Eisenstadt (1966: 22).

formed into a general philosophy of history the grievances and claims of a segment of the politically aware Western European workers, at that time only a very modest proportion of the proletariat. These grievances were then expressed in the form of the class struggle, that is, as total opposition to the existing system. In this second step, using as a base the psychology of these workers in the transition period, Marx theorized their rejection of capitalism *but not of industrialism*. Workers would have to realize that, although their chains were those of the new industrial system, such a system would have a benevolent long-term effect for them *once its capitalist structure was destroyed*. Finally, the workers should not be distracted from this realization by other nationalistic, religious, ethnic, economic, or other considerations. Only then would social grievances transform themselves into class action. However, at each of these critical junctures, alternatives were possible, and other actors were interested in making these available and credible.

From this point of view, class or class conflict has no special or dominant guaranteed role in politics. Class conflict has dominated the scene of sociology, and its almost mechanical reverberation in politics has led to the idea that class political alignments are the modern and normal form. By the same token, other forms of political division are seen as somehow artificially superimposed on the real and important divisions in the economic functional domain. Sometimes this belief is accompanied by the idea that this is a deliberate attempt by dominant economic circles or classes to conceal the base of domination; sometimes by the idea of false consciousness, that is, the limited capacity of workers and lower classes to see their real interests. This perspective (1) underestimates the ideological nature of the class cleavage itself, (2) exaggerates the simplicity of the political translation of class conditions and identities in class political action, and (3) indulgently disregards the late and often residual nature of such a dividing line with respect to others. The tendency is thus often to see modern mass politics in the light of the class cleavage.

*Second*, because the relations of individuals to the social basis of a cleavage are defined by certain attributes that can change with relative ease, this social basis represents a grouping and a set of social relationships that are normally much more fluid than those constituted by the cleavage itself. The *cleavage*, on the contrary, thanks to its behavioral and organizational dimension, *is a social relationship that implies a level of external closure* that is always more pronounced than that of the social group. In this sense, it should be noted that there is an important difference between class cleavages, on the one hand, and other cleavages – which may develop on



the basis of ethnolinguistic or peripheral communities or even religious identity – on the other. Class conditions are a social stigmata that can be modified by individual or group mobility or by emigration. Ethnic or religious identities are based on characteristics that lead more easily to a wholly closed relationship. This difference, in turn, helps to explain why these kinds of cleavages demonstrate such an impressive capacity to survive over time and to encapsulate their respective communities. Even in the case of social class, it would be a mistake to underestimate the extent to which members of class organizations – both parties and unions – have sought to improve their position through a monopolization of this social relationship and through its closure toward the exterior world. As an illustration of this, one need only recall the debates within the Second International on the “peasant question”: the resistance of the skilled working class to the incorporation into the movement of unskilled workers or even the more recent problems experienced by immigrant workers.

The process of political translation was even more complex for class than for other traditional identities. This is because class had left parties to mobilize their constituency in opposition to the individuals’ traditional ties of a local, ethnic, and/or religious nature. In every case, they had to induce them to act in a way that was in most cases contrary to and in contradiction with the norms and roles dominant in their geosocial milieu and, in general, against the authority of the consolidated social hierarchy at the local level. The competition among forms of representation based on territorial representation, cultural defense, or functional-economic interest does not easily flow to the advantage of the latter. Territorial forms of representation impose limits on the capacities and possibilities of party conflicts within the localities and tend to reduce or transform politics into a question of external representation, as the whole community is represented to the external world. By contrast, the functional/economic emphasis implies and reflects a type of alliance that crosses local geographical units and undermines the established leadership structure within the community, introducing into it elements of direct-interest conflict. Moreover, territorial and cultural defense need not be linked together, as they tend to be in Rokkan’s work. There might be prevalent forms of territorial representation without any cultural defense – as examples from France and the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries show – as well as a cultural-defense mobilization without a strong territorial basis, which cuts across territory and nationalizes politics, and a cultural defense guaranteed *through* territorial defense – as the Swiss Catholic cantons’ experience exemplifies. Thus, in certain circumstances, functional-class in-

terests may be trapped in an uneasy environment in which both cultural and territorial defenses coalesce to make it difficult to appeal to functional identities across territories and across cultural traits.

This problem may be less important for mobilization efforts along other lines, such as for instance religion. Here, there may be less emphasis on abstract ideals and remote collective groups against the local power structure; instead, the emphasis is on well-established identities and on authorities that offer a sense of protection against external authorities. In this sense, the task of mobilizing, already difficult for working-class parties when they had to cut individuals away from these traditional ties, became even more difficult when and where these traditional ties were already mobilized and were the source of very specific political identities.

*Third*, the social basis of a cleavage is essentially *unorganized*. In the case of the class cleavage, for example, the workers' parties, the trade unions, and other agencies of this kind are not the organizations of the social class per se, but are the institutional components of the cleavage. In other words, it can be argued that *the institutional nature of the class cleavage, in terms of both its social membership and its organizational form, is historically and country specific precisely because it does not depend exclusively on social class*. Of course, the model of interaction between the class cleavage and other cleavages is also largely country specific, and it is the sheer complexity of the manner in which the various cleavages become interlinked and superimposed on one another that makes it particularly difficult to disentangle the process leading from the development of structural prerequisites to the ideological and organizational patterning of the politicization phase. Moreover, once cleavages become established and organizationally institutionalized, they develop their own autonomous strength and, in turn, act as an influence on social, cultural, and political life. Thus, not only do cleavages become more stabilized than social classes or groups, but they are themselves a means of political stabilization, providing individuals with a constellation of preexisting alternatives for their own social and political integration.

Parties, and in general the organizations of the cleavage line, also have the job of creating opportunities and "spaces" in which the feeling of emotional belonging among the members can be created and reinforced. This is more or less necessary, depending on the conditions of environmental hostility that surround the parties. Such spaces become more necessary the more the party has to face severe forms of repression and opposition. Thus, the building of a large, isolated subcultural network of ancillary organizations has often primarily served the function of members' socialization and defense in periods of environmental hostility. Moreover, party

subcultural organizational networks reinforce emotional solidarity as well as socializing new members. The way in which such subcultural networks are established in several areas of social life depends on the specific nature of the cleavage and, in particular, on its social basis. Emotional feelings of solidarity are probably more easily shaped and organized by peripheral and ethnolinguistic minorities or by religious groups that are sharply opposed to dominant groups or are simply discriminated against and/or repressed. The homogeneity of the working class, in terms of division of labor, housing conditions, educational levels, workplace, and so on, creates those areas of equality that facilitate the establishment of such subcultural milieus and the development of strong emotional ties within the group. By contrast, such changes as the increasing internal differentiation of labor, workplace heterogeneity, disappearance of specific industrial communities, increasing spatial mobility, and the separation of workplace and residence, as well as growing dependence on impersonal contacts with the party organization and the reduction of daily personal contacts with other members of the group (e.g., through increasing resort to private means of transport), create conditions that weaken the emotional ties of a group. At the same time, however, these subcultural networks are a result not only of favorable social conditions, but also of deliberate efforts by parties to create them and to fight against unfavorable conditions. Once in place, these networks can help to serve the goal of maintaining and even reinforcing group emotional ties with great effectiveness even in periods of rapid change in the earlier structural conditions of similarity.

However difficult the comparative study of these processes might be, it is here that we find the key to understanding the development of different *cleavage systems* characterized by varying levels of organizational fragmentation and social homogeneity across European countries. For example, it is impossible to grasp the difference between the fragmented and socially heterogeneous social basis of the class cleavage in the Southern European countries, on the one hand, and the cohesive and relatively socially homogeneous basis of the class cleavage in the Scandinavian North, on the other, other than by reference to the interplay between the structural, ideological, and organizational aspects of the class cleavage itself *and* between the class cleavage and other cleavages. It follows from this that cleavages have histories of their own that differ substantially from the histories of their social bases and from the histories of their original mobilization and politicization. Such histories, and the strength and hold of traditional or emerging cleavages, can be assessed only in terms of all three constitutive elements, that is, changes in social stratification, changes in the corresponding cultural systems, and changes in sociopolitical orga-

nizational forms (not only political parties, but also the networks of social, professional, and other organizations expressive of the cleavage). It also follows that although we define the class cleavage in relation to its genetic origin, this expression does not indicate that the workers, all the workers, or only the workers represent its social constituency. The social membership of the class cleavages may vary considerably over time and across countries.

Any attempt to translate this line of reasoning into an empirical inquiry regarding the modalities of class cleavage structuring necessitates a major attempt to devise indicators and collect data on social structure, attitudes, and organizations. Such an inquiry also needs to be *cross-nationally comparative* and to have a long-term *historical* dimension. It is not surprising that it has rarely been attempted at a comparative level. Rather, most research<sup>22</sup> usually analyzes and privileges a *single* dimension of cleavage structuring (or destructuring) at the national or cross-national level.

Some analysts concentrate mainly on the relationship between the social stratification of European societies and patterns of voting. Through survey data, attempts are made to ascertain the closeness of the relationship between the two, measuring the extent to which social group membership proves an effective predictor of partisan choice and, more broadly, investigating the social, cultural, and psychological characteristics of the left-wing voter.<sup>23</sup> These studies invariably concentrate on the *social homogeneity* of the class cleavage membership. Another research tradition focuses primarily on the changing attitudes and beliefs of the mass public, arguing that the parties of the traditional left face an increasingly complex pattern of competition along a number of other issue dimensions and that a wide selection of new concerns – ranging from neolocalism to environmentalism to welfare problems and law and order – impact on different sections of the population in different ways and thus tend to cut across more-traditional ties based on occupation, income, and status and to undermine the *cultural distinctiveness* of any class alignment.<sup>24</sup> Finally, a separate tradition challenges the view that the political parties of the left *reflect* the identity, interests, and consciousness of the social group. Assuming that

<sup>22</sup> I am not concerned in this context with that tradition of analysis that treats cleavages as an *independent variable* to account for systemic properties such as stability and democratic performance. The starting point of this literature is Simmel (1956). For other key analyses see Eckstein (1966), Nordlinger (1972), and Lijphart (1968: 3–44).

<sup>23</sup> The literature in this area is too large to be quoted in full: Representative of this line of interpretation are Alford (1963); Rawson (1969), Abramson (1971), Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer, and Platt (1971: 11–13), and Lipset (1981).

<sup>24</sup> See the sources on cultural cleavage cited in footnote 13. For a good synthesis see Hildebrandt and Dalton (1978: 69–96).

the role of political organization is essential to the creation of the subjective class, this perspective stresses that attention should be focused on the fate of the major left *political organizations* – the trade unions and other agencies and organizations that help to create, reinforce, and transmit group attitudes and attachments. The fate of the class left is thus linked to its capacity to adapt to the new conditions in which it is obliged to reproduce its support and ideology.<sup>25</sup>

These different research traditions tend to give priority to just one of the three constitutive aspects of any cleavage: the reference social group and its possible modifications, the political attitudes and ideological structuring of the group consciousness, and the behavioral element giving rise to the organizational network on which the parties base their strength and of which they are themselves a part. To privilege one dimension or perspective may lead to speculation about the cleavage development that is quite different from that which can be advanced by privileging an alternative dimension. For this reason, in this work I consider them all as constitutive elements of the cleavage structuring. This latter – my dependent variable – is operationalized through different properties, and the cross-country variation of these dimensions is interpreted as resulting from a macroconstellation of systemic factors. The following section outlines the framework as a whole.

### ***DEPENDENT VARIABLES: THE PROPERTY SPACE OF EUROPEAN LEFT VARIATION***

Summarizing this discussion, Figure 1.1 graphically presents the structuring of a cleavage in terms of the three dimensions of *social constituency*, *organizational network*, and *cultural distinctiveness*. Each of the three dimensions changes empirically from cleavage to cleavage, from country to country, and from historical period to historical period. While the cleavage dimensions of social constituency and organizational network have been largely dealt with by the literature, that of cultural “distinctiveness” is more complex. By this term I do not mean the process of “objectivization” of class whereby a third element is introduced between the class as an objective social condition and the class as an expression of observable behavioral patterns of organizational membership and action; nor do I

<sup>25</sup> Kitschelt (1994) stresses this point in his interpretive line. In general, the emphasis on the capacity for adaptive change of the established parties is a dominant theme of the work of P. Mair, whose main contributions in this direction are now collected in Mair (1997).

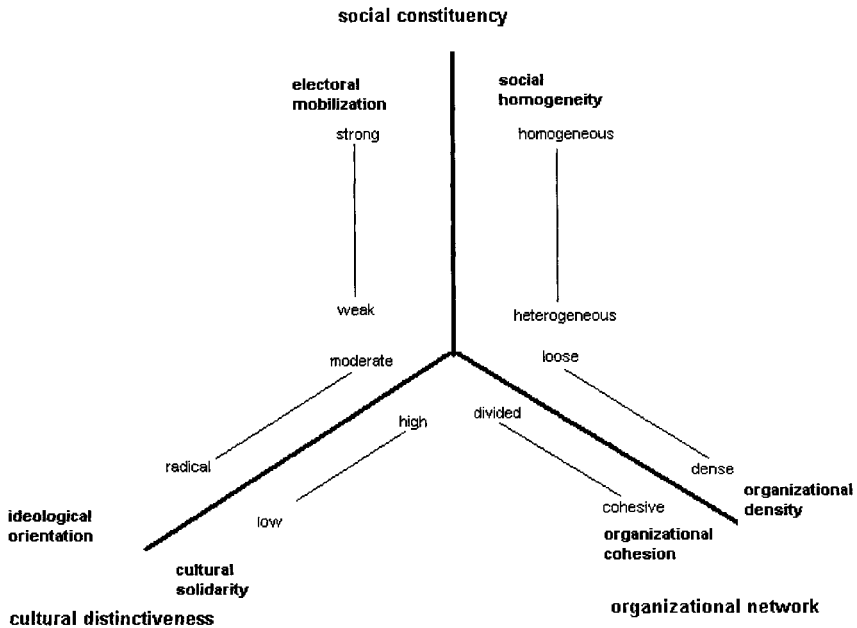


Figure 1.1. Dimensions of cleavage structuring.

mean the “class interest,” as this is defined both independently of what individual workers declare it to be and as the political elites and organizational leadership express it. Cultural distinctiveness instead indicates that a certain number of individuals, without any external constraints, react in a similar way to similar situations and absorb *des obligations sociales et des coutumes*, a spontaneous kind of moral behavior within a given group. While the social constituency of a cleavage is ascertained in terms of social homogeneity – that is, a similarity of social conditions – cultural distinctiveness pertains more to the dimension of “community,” of a similarity of values and obligations and a sense of belonging. It is difficult to separate this aspect clearly from the communality of the social condition and from the specific pattern of organizational membership and behavior. It refers to something that is similar to what Aron called the “objectivization” of communities when he referred to features that Weber called “ethos,” and to the equivalent concept of “habitus” in Bourdieu.<sup>26</sup>

Given that variations in outcomes are used as a key to the comparative search for causes, it is essential to start with an accurate definition of any such variation. The scheme in Figure 1.1 helps to organize the dependent

<sup>26</sup> Aron (1989: 462–471).

variables in a synthetic form. The social constituency dimension points to two aspects of cleavage structuring. (1) *The first is the level of electoral mobilization*, that is, the *electoral strength* of the different left political organizations, meaning the extent to which they were capable of mobilizing support and obtaining the electoral loyalty of sections of the population. From this point of view, there are *strong* and *weak* lefts in electoral terms. At the same time, the structuring of the class cleavage resulted in (2) different *social compositions* of its electoral constituency. From this point of view, class cleavages can be ranked in terms of the extent to which they managed to mobilize the putative social target as well as other social groups. Class cleavages will therefore be characterized by a *higher* or *lower* level of *social homogeneity* of support.

The second important dimension of variation concerns the *organizational network*, which can also be seen from two distinct perspectives. The first perspective concerns *organizational cohesion*, that is, to what extent in their organizational development national lefts were capable of maintaining organizational unity or, alternatively, were faced with processes of internal organizational fragmentation. In this perspective, the European experience sees a *cohesive* and a *divided* left. The second perspective concerns the degree of *organizational density* of the class cleavage, that is, the extent to which such a cleavage rested on a densely organized network of corporate, political, and cultural associations or, at the opposite extreme, consisted mainly of ideological and attitudinal opposition deprived of strong organizational vertebration. The issue is thus the extent to which class cleavages were organizationally encapsulated.

The dimension of cleavage *cultural distinctiveness* also includes two subdimensions. At the level of the political elites and participant activists, the most important element concerns the predominant *ideological orientation* of the movement. The distinction in this case involves different *types of class-left ideologies* (orthodox Marxism, syndicalism, communism, etc.) and the extent to which they are *moderate* or *radical*. Clearly, here I am not interested in the ideological or theoretical schools in themselves, but rather in their spreading and appearing as convincing answers to the problems of the people. The causes and the consequences of the spread of different ideologies are sociological and political questions that have little to do with their exegesis and even less with their success or failure in terms of the accuracy of their historical predictions. At the level of the masses, the important element is the level of *cultural solidarity* that the cleavage structuring is able to create and reproduce within a social constituency. Different class cleavages rest on different levels of class solidarity, on different types of working-class culture, and on the different intensity of feelings of

belonging. However, despite its importance, this aspect of cleavage cultural distinctiveness will not be included in this study because I have been unable to conceptualize it, let alone measure it, in any way. Although several historically detailed studies exist at the national level, it is extremely difficult to frame this dimension in a way that allows for grounded comparative statements to be made.<sup>27</sup> Rather than dealing with this aspect unsystematically, I have preferred to omit it from my research. Only indirect indications will therefore be derived on this topic from other dimensions of cleavage structuring.

To sum up, the three dimensions of cleavage structuring are translated into six variables (Figure 1.1), only five of which will be directly dealt with in this study: electoral strength, social homogeneity, organizational cohesion and density, and ideological orientation. The study will attempt to explain to what extent and why the class cleavage is electorally strong, socially homogeneous, organizationally cohesive and dense, and ideologically moderate or radical in different historical experiences.

Not only is there cross-country variation, but there is also cross-time variation in each of these properties. That is to say, outcomes are different according to the moment in time at which the study is carried out. On the eve of World War I, for example, the picture would reveal a strong and unified German socialist movement, while in the United Kingdom the working class was organized through unions that were mostly concerned with the marketplace and voted for the Liberals – what we would call today a “catchall party”. Thus, the homeland of industrial capitalism had no socialism, while at the same time, “backward” Finland had a strong radical social democratic party with 37% of the vote.<sup>28</sup> Few observers of the time could have guessed accurately where the future of socialist ideology and organization lay. In the early 1920s an evaluation of left radicalism would have pointed to the Norwegian Labor Party as having the most extreme position, given its almost unanimous adhesion to the Third International. Yet, the Norwegian radical takeover was short-lived, and the ensuing history of the party can be more appropriately described as a trend toward consensus.<sup>29</sup> In other words, there is a problem with interpreting

<sup>27</sup> Theoretical discussions of this aspect are not as rare as attempts at comparative evaluation of it. See, for instance, Mann (1973).

<sup>28</sup> Sombart (1905) pointed to the paradox that the United States, the country he regarded as having the most advanced industrial capitalism and representing the direction of future European development, did not have a socialist working class. The question, then, was whether the United States represented an “exceptional” development or just the future European development, and whether the rise of socialism was a necessary and inevitable corollary of the development of capitalism.

<sup>29</sup> See Torgersen (1962).